

Friday March 13, 2015
KUTV Interview
Elder D. Todd Christofferson
Apostle
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XybDk3CEoHg>



Transcript

Reporter: Elder Christofferson thank you for talking with us. I was at the signing a Senate bill 296 yesterday. Elder Perry was there and others. What was that like as church leaders to see that bill from its birth to being signed into law in such a short time?

Christofferson: It was exhilarating, in a way, because it was something we hoped for but didn't know for sure would happen. When we had our press conference setting out our ideas and our principles and our recommendations at the beginning of the session, I think it was the second day of the session, back in late January we knew that there'd be a lot of hard work to bring that into reality if indeed the legislature decided to take it up as we hoped. T\But those hopes have borne fruit. We're very pleased about that. It's not been easy – we didn't think it would be, frankly. We knew that there was going to be... um.. I mean to state the principal, state the idea, state the concept is one thing. To bring them into reality and parse the words and get it all down on paper in the form of legislation is another another thing. But we really do give credit to all parties on all sides and every interest for coming together as they did in the search for, as we said, fairness for all. We couldn't be more proud, frankly, of the people of the state and and all who participated.

Reporter: President Wayne Niederhauser of the Senate also said it wasn't easy. He said at times people wanted to leave the table. Did the church get everything it wanted out of this – the ultimate end product?

Christofferson: Well, the main thing – yes. That we would have a balance of non-discrimination. We thought that was critical, I mean, people are people and they all deserve to be respected and honored and to have their privileges as everyone else does in our society. And that goes for the LGBT community and everyone else. We thought that was a gap that existed,

unfortunately, in the state code, for sure. And we felt the need for added protections and making them more explicit as regards religious expression and freedom of conscience and that sort of thing. So you know it was, on balance, I think something very positive and I believe everybody feels that same way. As the senate president said, president Niederhauser, there are moments when at a given time in discussions and negotiations you think it's not gonna succeed. You think is gonna break down totally and the feelings are intense and you almost despair. But to everyone's credit they persevered and I give credit to the legislature, the many legislators. In the past we've had a number bills dealing only with religious freedom matters. A number of proposals – bills dealing only with nondiscrimination. The fact that with goodwill these could all come together and craft one that incorporates both is a great achievement.

Reporter: Are you worried at all, is the church worried about future proposals that may undermine that balance that was found between religious freedom and anti-discrimination?

Christofferson: Well all the parties agreed that to avoid that they would include a rather unusual provision in this law that's called "non severability" meaning that if one part is repealed or challenged and for whatever reason goes away then the whole thing goes away.

Reporter: I remember reading that. So that gives you peace of mind knowing that...

Christofferson: I think it gives all sides, all parties, the comfort that the balance that's been achieved will remain and if part of it goes then we start over. But I think it's, you know, with what's been.. the effort that's been made, the goodwill that's been shown, the result as it is – a very positive one, is going to keep it in place.

Reporter: Members of the LDS Church have been watching this too, around the the country, and it brings up the question as they're dealing with these issues, maybe within their families, or trying to understand how maybe

religious freedom applies to them within the church. Obviously the church has its doctrine, but can members of the church, say, support gay marriage or other things that are related to this bill that the Church teaches against – can they support that?

Christofferson: Well there is a diversity of opinion among church members in that regard and you know that's always been true I guess on many subjects over the years over the decades and we don't have qualms about that. We urge people to take part, for example, in the political process and we don't tell them how to vote or who to vote for but that they exercise their own good judgment and make their decisions. Obviously that's different than when somebody attacks the church, you know per se, or tries to hinder its work. But anybody pursuing their view of what ought to happen in the community – that's what we hope to see, frankly. In a way you saw it here in the legislature. The vast majority of legislators in Utah are members the LDS Church and you see a wide variety of opinions in them and among them as you do in our at the federal level in the US and in other countries. So if we're trying to get everybody to sing the same song and say exactly the same thing we're failing miserably, but you saw that in this case as in most I hope people do work to come together on what can be the best solution for everybody.

Reporter: I know that in one of the temple recommend interview questions it asks do you agree with elements that are against the church and I guess, I mean, could it be interpreted that if people supported gay marriage that would be agreeing with something that was against the church?

Christofferson: Well it's not do you agree with a person's position or an organization's position – it is are you supporting organizations that promote opposition or positions in opposition to the church.

Reporter: So would supporting gay marriage threaten somebody's membership in the church if they went out say on Facebook or Twitter and actively advocated for it?

Christofferson: That's not an organized effort to to attack our effort or attack our functioning as a church, if you will.

Reporter: So members can hold those beliefs even though they're different from what you teach at the pulpit?

Christofferson: Yes. And we..you know, our approach in all of this, as Joseph Smith said, is persuasion. You can't, he said, you can't use the Priesthood and the authority of the church to dictate. You can't compel, you can't coerce. It has to be gentleness, persuasion, love unfeigned as the words are in the scripture.

Reporter: How would you describe the evolution of the church over time on this issue, I mean, for the last couple years essentially the anti-discrimination act got no traction. The church coming out was a game-changer that many people believe that's what made this law come into play but we know that over the decades rhetoric from church leaders hasn't always been so supportive of measures like this. How as an apostle would you explain to members the movement in church leaders on what they say about this issue from decades ago to today?

Christofferson: Well the doctrines have been have been clear and have been consistent and I want to emphasize this is not a doctrinal evolution or doctrinal change as far as the church is concerned. It's how things are approached, how things can come together when the time is right, how to talk about things, you know, how to be sensitive as you grow in understanding for example about same-sex attraction as we all have. How do we help families, not just individuals, but families cope with what that means and to maintain love and communication and fellowship in the family and in the church to the extent that that's possible. In this case, you know non-discrimination, we never did see an opening for that to happen in a way that was not threatening, if you will, to other things we hold precious until we could combine it with those protections and opportunities and openings if you can say it that way for both to go forward together. And when things came together finally and some of these things mature over

time obviously as you know. When it came to the possibility of combining both sides of the non-discrimination issue so to speak then we could move forward. And we expect to see things happen in the future, you know, I don't think that everything is resolved with this legislation. This deals with housing with employment and part of the things that affect our lives in this society a pluralistic society there'll be other questions that come and go as they always do and they have for generations. But where there's goodwill where there's that interest, as we say, in fairness for all you can come to accommodations and solutions that don't leave one side as the loser and the other side supposedly the winner.

Reporter: Interesting you talked about greater understanding. Do you think it's fair to say that church leaders over these decades have gained greater understanding toward the LGBT community and that's contributed to a change in what's being said?

Christofferson: Well I think we've all had... all aspects, all elements of society – including ourselves have gained added understanding over the years – especially in recent years as we've seen more inter-communication I mean more communication – back and forth, more sharing, more openness on all sides. And there are the science issues, you know, the social science and the physical science and all the other pieces, if you can say, to the puzzle that are coming into focus. There's still a lot of questions. There is still a lot that nobody can claim to fully understand. So we're seeking added understanding. We're still learning, we think, and I hope everybody feels that way. That that we can walk together and grow in understanding, but with mutual respect. So its been happening and I hope it continues.

Reporter: Were you personally involved in the negotiations for SB 296?

Christofferson: I was not.

Reporter: You were not – but you were involved, obviously, publicly in pushing for it.

Christofferson: Right.

Reporter: We've reported on your situation – you have a brother who is gay and you've talked about how that has impacted your family. Has that, personally for you, has that family dynamic impacted at all how you've approached this issue – how you approach publicly advocating as an apostle for SB 296?

Christofferson: No. The real genesis and the movement, if you will, behind these issues has been a matter counseling together as we do in the church. We operate by councils. There's the Quorum of the Twelve which is a council, the First Presidency is a council and at the ward the local levels and the stake levels we rely heavily on counselling together to determine which way to go and to... as a way of facilitating revelation and inspiration and receiving guidance that way. So it's not one person says "you know because of this experience that I've had in my life this is how we need to do it." But it's this sharing of past experience, sharing of knowledge and background but it's after everything else a search for revelation. A search to know what the Lord's will is and that's what we try to follow.

Reporter: Really, I just have one more question. Obviously, again as I said, we've seen rhetoric from church leaders change or soften over time. Is it possible... what would you say to those members who wonder is it possible... would the church ever one day accept monogamous same-sex marriage or move further beyond the position that you're currently at?

Christofferson: I don't think so, because that's such a fundamental aspect of what we see as the purpose of life. You know we talk about the plan of salvation as we as we call it and take into account the pre mortal existence, this current existence and what comes here after. Marriage between a man and a woman, the family that grows out of that – all that is so fundamental to what has happened, what needs to happen here and what comes here after that without it it falls apart. So I don't think we can take away the cornerstone without everything else coming down.

Reporter: You say “you don’t think” are you leaving any room at all for...

Christofferson: No. [chuckle]

Reporter: No room. Anything else you’d like to add about 296, about the recent events in Utah that we’ve seen? Anything else I haven’t touched on that you like to add?

Christofferson: Only to reiterate how pleased we are, speaking for the leaders of the church, to see such goodwill over so many diverse groups and opinions and feelings. It gives me a great hope for the future.

Reporter: All right. Thank you very much. Appreciated it.

Spectator: Can you answer just one additional question?

Christofferson: Yeah.

Spectator: So, just listening to your answers here, one thing that comes to mind is this has been a divisive issue in all of society but i think also within the church. That people are still trying to sort out exactly how they think and feel and how to act. They don’t like feeling like they’re in opposition to the church but they may, in their heart, feel like marriage equality is something that they have a personal conviction of. What would be your message to those individuals within the church that are trying desperately to stay within the church but feel like because they’re so at odds with what is publically stated that they no longer feel like they might fit? What would be your message to them? You know, the church has done a lot with the “I’m a Mormon” campaign to emphasize the diversity of the backgrounds and perspectives within the church. On this issue specifically, I think people sometimes feel like it’s in or out.

Christofferson: Well, it’s not an easy thing and I believe we recognize that. Our hope is that over time, as we stay together and worship together and search for inspiration together, that ways open up for people of all persuasions to come to feel that they’re comfortable here. While they don’t

know the eventual outcome and what's going to happen in the near term, I should say what's going to happen in the near term, they know the end result can be happiness. A state of happiness, a state of fulfillment. Something that God desires for all. And we firmly believe no one is predestined to a second class status in heaven. No one who is faithful to the commandments and the principles that we teach – even though that may involve some very significant sacrifice in the short term – even all of moral life if you can call that short term, is all worth it in the end because nothing is denied anyone who is faithful. We don't see all how that comes together, but we have the faith that it does because we have a God who created us all, loves us all and is gonna give everyone who tries and who is loyal to him everything that he has to give.